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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
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Item 5 of the provisional agenda*
Implementation of article 21 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Reports provided by specialized agencies of the United Nations on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

1. On behalf of the Committee, the Secretariat invited the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), on 29 April 1999, to submit to the Committee by 15 May 1999 a report on information provided by States to FAO on the implementation of article 14 and related articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which would supplement the information contained in the reports of the States parties to the Convention that will be considered at the twenty-second session. Annexed to the present note is a country brief prepared by FAO on Burkina Faso.

2. Other information sought by the Committee refer to activities, programmes and policy decisions undertaken by FAO to promote the implementation of article 14 and related articles of the Convention.

3. The report annexed hereto has been submitted in compliance with the Committee's request.

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BURKINA FASO

Agriculture

Agriculture and livestock provide livelihoods for 90% of the population of Burkina Faso with women constituting 48% of the economically active labour force in agriculture.[1] The principal cash crop is cotton, and livestock rearing is also important to the economy, contributing around 14% of the export revenue. The principal subsistence crops are millet, sorghum and maize. In non-drought years, Burkina Faso is almost self-sufficient in basic food stuffs. The north of Burkina Faso is within the Sahelian climatic zone, but most of the country falls within the savannah belt. There are few water-courses, thus limiting the possibilities for irrigation, in addition the soil quality is varied but generally more fertile in the south-west.

Women in Agriculture

Approximately 95% of women work in the subsistence agriculture or the informal sector, using low levels of technology. Women also play an important role in the utilisation and management of forest resources.

Women divide their time between agricultural and domestic task, spending as much as 14 hours a day in such work in comparison to men's 8.5 hours, including food processing and preparation.[2] Their limited access to water and fuelwood increases their work burden. Gender-disaggregated data is needed to analyse and understand the division of labour in the agricultural sector in Burkina Faso.

Social and economic decisions in the family and the community are usually made by men and the elderly. Although public life is dominated by men, a growing number of women's groups are forming, promoting the interests of rural women.

The changing traditional gender specific nature of farming patterns has resulted in a rise in the number of women farmers. In Burkina Faso, due to urban and out migration, women have taken over the tasks formerly carried out by men in addition to those for which they are traditionally responsible for. The number of female headed households is estimated to 10% .[3]

Women's access to resources

Extension services and agricultural training: In addition to the constraints of a difficult environment, agricultural and livestock production are held back due to low-technology methods. Only 36% of the households have access to extension service and activities directed to women primarily focus on improved nutrition and the conservation of fruit and vegetables.

Land: In general, women have less access to land than men; when women do own land, the land holding tends to be smaller and located in more marginal areas. Rural women also have less access than men to credit, which limits their ability to purchase seeds, fertilisers and other inputs needed to adopt new farming techniques. Although women's access to credit and extension services is improving due to the increase in special programmes and funds created

[1] Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Profile, Burkina Faso 1998-99.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Rural Women and Food Security: Current Situation and Perspectives, FAO, 1997.

to address their particular needs, access to land continues to pose problems for rural women. In Burkina Faso few women own land, due to primarily socio-cultural factors. It is estimated that less than 6% of women are landowners, despite the revision of the Agrarian and Land Reform which abolished all discrimination in this domain.[4]

Forestry: The area of woodland has declined specially in the vicinity of urban areas, mainly due to felling for firewood, but local tree planting projects are strongly encouraged by the government. In 1991, the government introduced a long-term national environmental management programme, which aims to stop the degradation of natural resources and manage the country's forest resources and wildlife.[5] Women's lack of access to land ownership limits their forestry activities despite their significant role in the utilisation of the forests. Other constraints are insufficient credit and the insufficient involvement of women foresters as well as long working hours to fetch firewood.

Mechanisms to promote the advancement of Women

In Africa, the creation of national women's machineries is a critically important step in ensuring that women's needs and constraints are put on the national policy agenda. Burkina Faso established a separate Ministry for the Promotion of Women (Ministere de la promotion de la femme, MPF) in 1997 with the overall objective to pursue and evaluate strategies aimed at the promotion of women. The Ministry of Agriculture has also been promoting rural women through their "Service des femmes rurales".

Sharing of power and decision-making: In regards to members and office bearers of agricultural/rural organizations, while women are present in greater and lesser degrees, they tend to comprise a low proportion of the membership and are often not represented in the higher levels of leadership. Women's representation in decision-making positions within the Ministry of Agriculture and other ministries and government bodies dealing with rural development is similarly low. At the local government level, few women hold decision-making positions and are only rarely involved in traditional authority structures. As these bodies are often responsible for local resource allocation, women's lack of representation at this level has many negative implications in terms of their access to such resources.[6] Data collection is needed on the number of women in other high-level positions in technical ministries or other government bodies.

FAO's activities on gender in Burkina Faso

- FAO's Socioeconomic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA) programme conducted training of trainers in Burkina Faso during the spring of 1998, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Ministry of Agriculture of Burkina Faso. This was aimed at strengthening national capacities in agricultural extension through Socioeconomic and Gender analysis as part of the process of adapting and integrating SEAGA into development policies and programmes in Francophone countries and in the sub-region of West Africa.

- An initial strategy was developed by FAO, aiming at changing the framework used by forestry agents to include the gender aspect, with technical support by the Forestry Policy and Planning Division (FON). In the second phase, a programme of awareness building and sensitising of decision-makers was implemented, convincing traditional authorities to

[4] Burkina Faso, Fact Sheet, FAO 1995

[5] Economist Intelligence Unit, Country profile Burkina Faso, 1998-99.

[6] Women, Agriculture and Rural Development, A Synthesis Report of the Africa Region, FAO 1996.

give land and wood lands to women, providing the women formed small groups for the purpose. The women organised in groups, for example; 'Forest management and bee-keeping of the women of Bougnounou', 'Women organised for the production of rice in the Western Southern zone and of poultry farming within the framework of the FAO Special Programme for Food Security'. Another output of the project was the integration of women in the committee for land management.

- The Forestry project also organised various meetings discussing ways to eliminate illiteracy and to improve technical training with a specific gender objective to reach women and to put in place a financial support service system to promote their capacity for savings and credit in collaboration with the formal banking systems. This financial support and training made it possible for women to implement micro-enterprises to generate income and to increase their agro-pastoral productions. FAO also finances and implements a project, aiming at assisting with the training of young women engaged in the production and sale of horticultural products
- In addition several smaller projects with specific gender/women objectives have been funded through TeleFood.

Recommendations

- Improve the collection, analysis and dissemination of data disaggregated by gender.
- Increase research on resource allocation within the household and on the gender division of labour.
- Promote participatory methodologies in project formulation, planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- Increase support for local initiatives and strengthen women's groups and associations.
- Abolish discriminatory legislation.
- Increase women's participation in decision-making structures at all levels through raising quotas for women and awareness building among women.
- Improve women's access to credit, land and training. In particular, existing credit institutions should be strengthened and new created that take into account of women's needs, not only for agricultural productivity but also for small trade and other socio-economic activities with high returns; women's land rights; training should be directed to women in the management of their affairs.